

George Korothy #94
July 16, 1985

Q: Mr. Korothy, let me ask you, when did you first join the Army?

A: I joined the Army March 5, 1941.

Q: What brought you into the [Army] Air Corps?

A: Well, I enlisted in the [Army] Air [Corps] and I (laughter) asked For foreign service and I figured that Hawaii was the best place I could go to; the safest place anyway, because the War had already started in Europe and I figured well, Hawaii is a good place to go. So I asked for Hawaii and I got it. They uh... I, like I say, I enlisted and I went to Ft. Slocum, New York for until the boat came in. Then we took a boat from Brooklyn Navy Yard, up around through the Canal, and San Francisco, and then into Hawaii.

Q: What sort of duties were you assigned?

A: Uh, well when we first got to Hawaii we went through recruit training, and all the marching, and the "yes sir", and "no sir", and stuff like that. We were in boot training, I think, for about oh, two weeks or so. Then we were assigned squadrons in the 11th Bomb Group. (telephone)

We were assigned to the 11th Bomb Group and at that time I was assigned to headquarters, and of course I went to AM school and uh..

Q: What's AM?

A: Air mechanics. Uh, then the normal duties.... and about two weeks before the attack, well, we had been on like I said, we went on the red alert, and I had had a Water Safety course up in Aiea. One of the people that own this home up there allowed us the pool and I was instructing water safety uh, at the time. And uh, of course it was a daily thing. Every morning I'd go out to Aiea and have this Water Safety course.

And then during the red alert, uh, I can't remember whether it had been called off or what it was, but naturally everyone was on needles and pins not knowing what was going on because of the alert. And it was normal duties I guess uh... going down the line, and whatever.

Then we uh, the alert was called off Friday, December 5th at 3:00, and naturally it was just like being let out of jail. Everybody wanted to go off to town.

And then, like I say, Sunday morning, well I usually stayed around camp because I like tennis and swimming and stuff like that, and we had plenty of that on the base. And I was waiting for my tennis partner to come up from breakfast that morning. We were supposed to play at 8:00 and at 7:55 that morning we heard bombs... a bomb hit and we thought the

Navy was still practice bombing (because during the alert they had done a lot of that practice bombing) not realizing that it was the actual thing until we saw the HAD hangar go up; get a direct hit. And that went up and everybody knew that it wasn't practice anymore.

And as the Japanese planes came over you could see the markings and not realizing that they were Japanese. We thought that it was Russian planes because of the red circle. Because they have the star but it was real fast and... But then everybody, a few of the fellows said the Japs. And that was it.

And we got strafed pretty well and they were dropping bombs on the line. And they knocked out... I think they hit almost all the hangars and HAD [*Hawaiian Air Depot*] hangar of course, like I said, went up. I think the first thing they hit was the HAD hangar. They must have known exactly where it was because that was their primary target, when they came in.

And of course, the bombs were popping like crazy over at Pearl. We got hit but not as bad as Pearl. Because actually what they went for was the Navy really.

Q: Were there any of the men firing back at Hickam?

A: Yes, we had the .30-caliber Springfields that used in WWI that we went out and took "pot shots" at them. But like (laughter) it was more or less of a reaction than anything else.

And we got hit, the barracks. They came in over the barracks fairly well and strafing and bombing. And the one bomb was practically a direct hit right outside of the barracks. And we all dove into the barracks to get away from it because we saw them coming. And almost all of us made it excepting a few.

A good friend of mine got hit and not realizing that he had been hit I tried to push him inside and my hand got inside of him. He had a hole about the size of a football in his back. Larry Lawrence was his name. And of course I don't think he ever knew what hit him.

And then seeing what they were doing with the barracks we figured maybe we'd be better off if we got out and ran out to the ball-field because they had dug outs on the baseball field. And several of us took off and hit the dug outs and watched from there. It was devastating. They just... they had a field day. Uh, they didn't rush. They took their time. They knew exactly where they were going and what they were doing and it was something that's unforgettable.

It uh... after it was all over we... that was the first attack. We thought that maybe they were gone. But then they came back at about uh... well, they left us about oh, it must have been about 8:30 I think, and they came back again at about 10 with a new all loaded up... I guess it must have been a second

flight, whatever, came back in and they finished off what the first flight had started. I think they really worked on Pearl and they hit us again, but not as bad as they did the first flight.

And of course, from what we understood, had gone up to Schofield Barracks, which is about what, 10 miles away from Hickam or so, and they strafed and they bombed Schofield and Wheeler Field which is adjacent to Schofield. They worked on them and that lasted for about another half hour. Then they just took off. I guess they ran out of bombs and ammo.

But in the mean time some of the pursuits, the pilots up at Wheeler got off and I think there were a couple of them that got... they must have gotten about five or six of them, that I can think of, and that was about the only opposition they had.

And then uh, our B-17's came in later on that same day and in the evening. And of course everybody was on needles and pins not knowing that they were friendly; that they were our 17's. Everybody took "pot shots" at them. But thank God nobody... I don't think we got hit any of our own planes came in.

And it took several days to kind of get over it, but after that it got to be a joke around the base that if the Japs came in we'd be eating fish heads and rice. But it did a lot for the ... I think if they had thought that they were going to ruin the morale of the [Army] Air [Corps], or the Navy, or any part of the Services, I think that was a shot in the arm.

And to this day I still carry a oh, say a vendetta or something against the Japanese. I can't seem to get it out of my mind. And people say, "Oh you should forget about it. It 's been years ago." But it's very easy for people to say that that hadn't been there. And it's, I don't know, maybe in time I'll... it'll taper off a little bit, but as of now, I still feel the same way. I have a, like I said, maybe a personal vendetta. But uh, we learned our lesson and subsequently it proved fruitful as far as I'm concerned. I think they got everything that they should have gotten and I don't know.... I uh... something that I'll never forget.

Q: No, I can imagine. Well, I appreciate your coming by and sharing your experiences with us.

A: Well...

Q: Did you have anything else you wanted to add?

A: Oh no, not really. I uh... I get a little tongue tied sometime when I think about this thing and it's uh... brings back a lot of things that I'd just assume not think about.

Q: O.K. well thank you.